

## Autumn and everything after by mesiveloni

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**Summary:**

New exchange student arrives to NYU, and meets Jonathan Byers...

# 1. Chapter 1

The morning had been a catastrophe so far. I was late as I knocked on the door and teacher opened it. Luckily she didn't say anything about my lateness, just mentioning to other students that I was new exchange student and that she was hoping for them to welcome me warmly along. Then she was already returning to her topic.

Only seat available was next to the young guy with messy brown hair, leaning to his hand and keeping notes. "Hi, do you mind if I sit here," I asked him quietly and dropped my bag to the floor. He nodded and made some space on the table. As I sat down, few other students gave me curious looks. I smiled absent-mindedly back, still feeling a bit nervous after all the fuss.

"Which page are we going at," I peeked at the open books and at the guy. As he showed me the places, I realized his eyes were deep brown. Cute, I thought before trying to get my mind back to business and catching up with teaching.

After the class, we were packing our stuff away. Most of others had already gone from class, but guy next to me wasn't in a hurry. "Sorry, I didn't even introduce myself. I'm \_\_\_\_\_," I told him. "Hey. I'm Jonathan," he responded and smiled.

"I feel a little lost around here. Do you know where they keep the class for photography?" I asked him. "Sure. I'll show you. Any other classes?" he smiled more genuine this time. "Lots of them. And I'd like to find a library too, please. First day, you know..." I laughed. "Let's go, then," he beckoned me to follow.

After a quick tour, he walked straight into the class of photography in front of me, searching for familiar table. "Are you in this class, too?" I asked, dumbfounded. "Yup. If you want to, sit down. I'm not exactly mr. popular, so I sit mainly alone," he said nonchalantly.

I sat down next to him, since he didn't seem to mind, after all. He liked to keep to himself, and concentrated on studying. He was friendly enough, and though he was a little shy every time we paired up for exercises, it suited me just fine.

After the day, it felt like Jonathan had been almost like my saviour. We had been sharing most of our classes and the last one had just ended. He hadn't been kidding, he had really been sitting alone in all of the classes except one. I wondered why, since even if he was quiet, he was pretty nice.

I had felt almost sorry to sit elsewhere in that one lesson, especially since the girl pairing with me had been more interested about her friends behind her than teaching. Sure, she had been nice enough but...

"How do you like the dorms?" Jonathan's voice brought me back from my thoughts as I packed away my books. "Actually I stayed last night at the motel. That's why I was late this morning. I took a wrong bus. Tomorrow I should be able to get a single room from girls dormitory." I told him as we left the class.

"Are you kidding me, why stay at the motel? Didn't they have any place at the campus," he was shocked. "Well... I could've stayed there and shared with someone for some time, but... to be honest, I'm not that really into people. It took them some time to arrange things as they were originally agreed. Actually in the first place, another student had agreed to come here to exchange but then that person cancelled. Then I got to come instead," I flushed.

"Not into people? And still you came to NYU?" He rolled his eyes. "Look at you, mister popular, sitting alone," I poked him playfully and this time I made him laugh. "Touché. So, is your place far," he smiled. "Nah. I think I'll just walk back, now that I've got time. I'll see a bit of the city and get some fresh air," I shrugged.

"You can't just walk back, you'll get robbed or something," he argued. "I just might get robbed in subway or bus as well. It's not really much safer," I told him back. "Well, yeah, but..." he still tried to find reasons against mine. "So? I can take some photos on the way. Try to find good angles and fresh sights, you know?" I told him.

"Let me give you a ride. I want to know you're not going to be in trouble. You can have your pictures on the way," he said. "Whatever," it was my turn to sigh. It wasn't like I was five years old and I realized the dangers of big city, but he seemed to insist.

He led me to a parking lot, while I explained where I stayed. His car was old and rusty, but it somehow suited his style. The cassette started to play The Clash as he started the car and it made me smile and my toes wiggle. "You like the music?" He noticed, clearly pleased. "Yeah, I think they rock," I nodded.

As he drove, I pulled my camera out and took a few pictures from lowered window. Then I turned and took one of him. He was so concentrated at driving, and looking sort of good because of that. "What are you doing," He turned to glimpse at me. "I just took a picture of my very first american friend, you know," I said happily.

"I'm the first? Really? Thanks, I guess," he said, sounding a little happier himself. "Thanks for yourself giving me a ride. This was unexpected luxury. And you made my first day a lot easier. It's not exactly easy to find your place in the school when everybody have already formed their groups and one is simply few weeks late for that," I replied.

"You're welcome," he nodded. "It was nice to work with you as well. Anytime," he added.

In fifteen minutes we were in front of my motel. The ride had felt so short. He turned to see me as I got out of the car. "Thanks once again. I'd invite you for a cup of coffee or something but I sort of left a mess inside... so see you tomorrow at school?" I asked him. "Yeah, see you. Never mind about the ride. I'll have a rain check about that coffee," he smiled.

I closed the car door, swung my bag on the shoulder and walked to my door holding the keys. I turned to wave at him from the door as he turned to leave. This had been a nice day after all. Jonathan was really pretty quiet kind but friendly, and he'd managed to make me feel welcome in the new school.

Maybe this would become one awesome year in exchange as well.

## 2. Chapter 2

Someone knocked on my door and it spooked the hell out of me. It was an early morning, and I had just gotten ready for school, eaten a bit of breakfast, dressed up and put some make-up on my face. And I most certainly didn't expect anyone.

I took a step closer to the door and asked loudly who was it. As I bent to check the peephole on the door to see who it was, I heard a familiar voice. "It's Jonathan. I came to pick you and your stuff up."

I opened up, surprised. "Hey, what on earth are you doing here," I barely had registered what he had said. He possibly couldn't have gotten here to... "I just told you. You can leave your things in my car, so you don't have to pay for an extra day here," he grinned at me as I let him in.

I felt dumbfounded. It was all too much, he had been actually listening yesterday and came to help out on his own. It was so thoughtful and... "Well, chop chop. You shouldn't be late on another day, too," he hurried me up while I still tried to find the words.

I went and packed rest of my few things that weren't in my luggage. And then the school bag... was already on his shoulder. "You've got it all?" he inquired. "Yes, I think so," I replied, checking the places one more time just to see that I had everything with me.

As I locked the door, he grabbed my belongings and carried them to his car. I waved the key for him and went to take it away to the office. It was true, this was saving money for me, considering that I'd really get my room from girls dormitory today.

He was still waiting in the car as I returned, and started it up as he saw me. I got in and tried to think of a way to say thanks again for him. As if reading my mind, he smiled. "I thought that you might get in your head to walk again to school," he joked. "I might've had. Since it seems to give you creeps," I teased him back.

He was quiet for some time, his face growing more serious. "My younger brother disappeared few years ago, when he was coming

home alone. Things might have gone differently if I had been home and waited for him. Or even better, if I had picked him up myself and brought him home." He seemed anxious, talking about this.

"What happened for him," I asked carefully. "First mom and me thought he was lost. Then dead. But he wasn't. Eventually we... found him." As he searched for right words, I got a strangest feeling. It was like Jonathan hadn't planned to end the sentence that way but I wasn't sure. "How is he?" I asked.

"Better nowadays. He... we all changed. A lot happened. I'll go to visit them later this autumn, when we'll have our next vacation." He sighed, staring at the traffic. This was weighing hard on him. "Jonathan," I said and he turned to look at me briefly. "It's not... It wasn't your fault. You couldn't know," I told him.

He didn't say anything and I couldn't read any feelings from his face. Then we arrived at the university, and we both climbed out of his car. "Thank you for coming to get me. And thanks for taking care of me," I told him quietly as we walked together towards the entrance. He just nodded before turning to hurry to his lesson.

I knew I'd see him in few hours, when we'd share classes again. Our light moods had changed into something heavy in just matter of minutes, and I wondered how he'd be when we'd see each other again. Until then, I'd have to try to concentrate with my studying.

As I got out later from the classroom, he was waiting in the corridor. I knew he had things to say. I followed his lead in silence and he walked outside. When no one was in immediate distance for hearing us, he stopped. "Sorry. I don't know why I talked about that to you," he apologized. "Don't be. It's alright," I told him.

"It's just... easy to talk to you. It surprised me. I haven't talked about my brother with anyone... outsider... for a long while. I didn't even mean to," he stared at his feet, shifting his weight uneasily.

"I'll keep any secret you want to. And even if they aren't secrets. Talk all you'll like. It won't go forward to anyone," I promised. His deep brown eyes locked into mine, searching for something. I looked back at him. "Okay then," he affirmed.

Rest of the day passed quickly. Before I knew it, I found myself inquiring for my new room. Luckily it was empty and ready, and I got the key along with directions after signing the papers. Jonathan was waiting by his car, my luggages ready. As I reached for them, he pulled them away. "I can handle them. You just tell me where to take them," he told. "So bossy," I laughed, and he began to laugh with me.

My room was small, but it had all the essentials. It made me happy to get to settle down more permanently. This would be home for now. For my year in here. I sat down to bed as Jonathan put my bags to the floor. He turned to leave straight away. "Wait a minute," I called him and he turned around at the door.

Before I could say anything more, he already took the initiative. "I'll see you around. Settle here in peace, take it easy. I'll see you tomorrow." He smiled and closed the door carefully behind him. A moment later I saw him from the window, briskly walking away, hands in his pockets.

I began to unpack, searching for my familiar bedsheets and other stuff. Annoying, but Jonathan had been right. There was plenty to do, and homework in addition. This evening would go fast.

Luckily tomorrow would be friday and I'd finally have some time for myself. Ever since I landed to the airport at tuesday evening, I'd been always onto something and taking care of things. Maybe I'd actually get to relax tomorrow then.

### 3. Chapter 3

On Saturday afternoon I was lying on my bed, reading a book. I'd gotten several invitations to parties on this weekend, but then again, somebody always seemed to have a party here and even in the middle of week. It was fun sometimes, to let go and have a few drinks, but I wasn't really in the mood today.

Even if I had been talking to people more and some I'd like to befriend with, it felt a bit awkward to be surrounded with strangers. Then again, I had wanted to come to exchange here in Big Apple. But even with my introvert nature, I enjoyed watching the sights and hustle of the city. It was certainly different from my home.

Perhaps I could book myself a sightseeing tour somewhere for next weekend. It would be fun to view things from tourist angle and send some postcards home. Yesterday I had called for my parents and some shorter calls for my elder sisters, who weren't living with my parents anymore either.

Somebody was knocking at the door. I spun away from bed and went to open. Jonathan. I beckoned him to come inside and closed the door after him. "Hi," he said shyly. "Hi yourself. What's up," I replied, smiling.

"I was thinking would you like to go for that cup of coffee," he said. "There's one pretty nice diner nearby and they serve decent pie too," he continued. "Sure. I'll grab my jacket," I told him back, already reaching for the closet.

"What are you reading?" Jonathan turned my book over to see the cover. "Stephen King's Skeleton crew," I replied even though he saw the cover himself. "Do you like his books," I asked as we were getting out of my room. "I'm not really into horror anymore, even though I like reading. I guess I've gotten an overdose," he chuckled to himself sarcastically.

"Hey, would you know where I could find a cheap radio- and cassetteplayer?" I asked, changing the subject. "I don't know if you can find really cheap ones unless they are stolen. But maybe next



time I visit home, I could bring my old one with me. That is if you don't mind that it is old. It still functions well, though," he suggested.

"That would be awesome. I really miss getting to listen to music. When are you going next time?" I asked. "Probably on our next holiday at the end of October. Most likely I will drive there, and I can bring then whatever I like with me," he explained.

We arrived soon at the diner, and he opened the door for me. I went for a nice quiet booth in the corner. It was slightly cooler place to sit, but it guaranteed some privacy. Waitress brought us the menu's. Jonathan opted for coffee, and a piece of pecan pie. I felt like trying out the pie as well with a big cup of tea.

"Where are you from? I don't think you've told me," I asked. He chuckled. "I'm from Hawkins, Indiana. It's a real small town, you've probably never heard of it." "No, I haven't. Same applies to my hometown, though," I laughed. "But you were talking about driving home for vacation. Isn't Indiana a bit far?" I continued.

"Yeah, it is. I'm just not into flying and besides, there would still be ways into Hawkins. It is a bit in the middle of nowhere," he replied. By then waitress brought our order.

It felt wonderful to hold a warm cup in my hands and Jonathan had been right, the pie was just lovely. "What is your home like," I felt curious. Jonathan didn't really like to talk himself very often, and I knew little about him. By now he had mostly concentrated on our school assignments, when it came to chatting.

"Old. Not that big or fancy. Very much on the outskirts of the town, surrounded by forest. I was young when dad left, not that he was much use anyway. My mom pretty much had to use all she earned to support me, Will, herself and the house. It has seen renovation pretty much never, unless it was really needed. I got a part-time job as early as I could to get some load off on my mom's shoulders," he explained.

"What about your family then? I've gotten an impression that you are close with each other. It must be hard for them that you live this far away nowadays?" I really enjoyed hearing him do the talking for change.

"We are close, yes. We always used to be, but then Will's... disappearance... melted us even more together. However, it was always my biggest dream to study photography here in New York. They had heart enough to encourage me to work my hardest to be able to come here. And I did," he explained and took a sip of his coffee.

"Hmm. I think your pictures are maybe most talented ones I've seen. So much better than mine, since I tend to be hasty taking them," I told him and I could see how pleased he was about my compliment. However, my focus was distracted, as waitress turned the music slightly louder in the diner. She winked at me, seeing my delight.

"Love this song," I muttered. It was Cyndi Lauper's Time after time. "I don't. It reminds of my girlfriend," Jonathan said, looking rather sour. I panicked. It hadn't occurred to me that he might be in a relationship.

"I didn't know you have a girlfriend! God, I'm sorry!" I apologized. Jonathan raised his eyes, surprised. "No, I mean... we are not together anymore. She's now just an ex-girlfriend."

"I thought... not that we are here on a date, but..." I stuttered, feeling relieved. "I know. Besides, I do think that guys and girls can be just friends, without any romantic stuff between them," Jonathan said, pulling out his wallet.

"No, don't, this was supposed to be a treat from me to you," I argued as he pulled out enough money for both of our orders and left it on the table. "Nope, it's on me now. Save it for later," he smiled. We got up and left.

"Did you notice that waitress..." I began to say as we walked, feeling awkward. "...Totally thought we were a couple? Yeah," he laughed and my mood lightened as we walked. The evening was getting dark now, but the sky seemed as opaque as ever here in the city.

"So... I hope you don't get offended, but... have you been a single for a long time?" I asked him, keeping my eyes at the pavement ahead.

"Our relationship didn't last even for a year. At the beginning it was

really nice, but eventually it turned out just... I don't know, bland? She said once that we seemed to be together only when the world was ending. I guess she just... wasn't that interested about me, after all. She was already with someone else by the time I left here," he said bitterly.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. "It's alright," he said huskily, and I was certain that he so wasn't alright with it yet. "It's just that... I had a crush on her for a long while, and when I got to be with her..." he tried to explain, frustrated. I nodded, not sure what to say. What could you say, when his heart had clearly been broken and walked over with?

"Enough about me. Did you get an invitation to Jared's party this weekend?" He changed the topic. "Yeah, I got some invitations, why?" I asked, curious. "I think he likes you. He asked me if we have anything going on and if it was okay with me for him to ask you. I guess people have noticed us sitting together often," he shrugged.

"Well, I do like working with you," I said while I tried to remember on which class Jared was and how did he look again. It was actually easier to try to remember who had been talking about the parties to begin with. "Wait, was it handsome Jared?" I blurted out and then thought about what I had let out of my mouth. Shit!

"You think he's handsome? Interesting," Jonathan laughed. "No, I mean yes, but... I don't think I'm going anyway," I blushed. "Why not? Especially if you like him?" This time he sounded really curious. "I didn't say I liked him, just that he is goodlooking," I told him.

"And the problem is...?" He kept digging into this. "I don't know him well enough. For all I know, he could be a king douche. Besides, I don't feel like drinking this weekend," I tried to explain and it still seemed to go south from the sound of it. But Jonathan just shrugged and left the topic at that. "Wanna head back to dorms," he asked and I nodded.

We walked together in silence, but it didn't feel uncomfortable. At the front door he spontaneously bent to hug me lightly and thanked me for listening. I hugged him back, muttering warmly "likewise." As I walked in alone, back to my room, I thought about things he had told

me.

It seemed like he was quickly turning into my best friend here.

## 4. Chapter 4

In a few weeks things had mostly fallen in place and I had found my rhythm between school and hobbies. University and people attending began to feel sort of homey, too.

Jonathan and I hanged out pretty often together and our school projects usually got excellent grades. We were a good team and working together was easy, which made us pair up when we just could.

One day I was chatting at my locker with Nicky, who shared art history lessons with me. Someone tapped me on the shoulder and as I turned, I saw Jared. "Hey, wanna pair up with me at history of cinema class today," he asked. "Sure," I nodded. "Great. I'll reserve us some nice seats at the auditorium. See you in the afternoon!" He smiled and left.

"Ohhh, something going on with you two?" Nicky instantly began to tease. "Not really," I shrugged, not willing to give her any reason for gossip. We continued our chat, and after a while, I excused myself and went to find Jonathan. He was already by our photography class, waiting for doors to open.

Later we were alone developing our pictures in the darkroom and I told him about Jared, apologizing that I had to skip our usual deal. "Never mind," he grinned. "Just don't ditch me totally for tall and handsome." Between us, Jonathan kept teasing me and insisted calling him still "handsome Jared", as I had once called him.

I poked him playfully. "What if I will?" He sighed dramatically. "Then at least remember to thank me in your speech, when you'll be the crowned queen in the next spring ball," he pretended to be sad and then laughed. "Jerk," I called him and he nudged me, making me giggle along.

In the last class of afternoon, I headed to auditorium with Jonathan. He stayed rather up and in the side as his usual style was, winking to me as we separated. As I kept descending the steps, I saw Jared waving for me in the middle row. He had two plastic cups from

cafeteria in front of him. "Here, I got you too an iced coffee," he said and gave me another. "Aww, thanks," I accepted as I took my seat next to him.

We talked for a while before today's film started, both of us keeping small notes. Every now and then we quietly pointed out some things worthwhile to notice to each other. Filling the papers and leaving them to teacher was easy after the movie ended.

As I began to leave, Jared suggested that we could pair up sometime later again. "Yeah, we could," I agreed. "Thanks once again for the company and the coffee," I smiled to him and he seemed pleased.

As soon as I was nearly out the auditorium doors, I secretly peeked back at Jared. He was surrounded by few of his friends again and in the middle of conversation. So, today wasn't definitely about the lack of friends to study with.

In a few moments, Jonathan caught up with me. "How did it go," he inquired. "Okay," I shrugged. "And is he a king of all d---..?" He grinned as I hurried to interrupt him. "No, at least not yet."

"He's totally going to ask you again," he said as we walked together towards the dorms. "How do you know? Why?" I asked him even though I had my own suspicions.

"Just having a feeling," he replied, chuckling as we separated towards the opposite buildings.

## 5. Chapter 5

In another week, Jared asked me again to pair up with him in the same class. After a quick moment of hesitation, I agreed. Last time had been okay, though and Jonathan didn't seem to mind last week. Perhaps I'd ask Jonathan for evening dinner at his favourite diner. He had seemed so tired and quiet this week.

Before the last class, I dropped by the cafeteria. Jared had been sweet last week and gotten us something... hmm, what to take? I grabbed two juicy looking apples, took few napkins, paid and hurried on my way. At least they were easy to keep in the bag, while I searched for Jared in the auditorium.

Last week we had been watching *The bridge on the river Kwai*. This time teacher announced that we would be watching and analysing an artsy romantic drama, and it made me groan internally. Jared instead seemed to be rather enthusiastic and had brought us once again drinks.

As the lights went off, I reached for the apples in my bag and offered him another. He quietly joked I was offering it to the wrong guy, nodding towards Adam in the next row below us. I shrugged, telling I wasn't exactly Eve either, making him grin.

Our fingers brushed each other lightly as I let the fruit out of my grip. It made me feel shy and I had to remind myself we were at school, not at a date. In a next moment a love scene popped to the screen, showing quite lot of skin. For a moment I froze with a bite of apple in my mouth. Good thing that blushing would be likely hidden in the dark.

If this had been a movie to watch alone, I wouldn't have probably minded. Not that something like this had been my first choice. And not that I hadn't had a boyfriend, but with a potential crush like Jared and in this situation... I had to really concentrate on the symbolism aspect, but by the end of the film, I wondered if we had watched porn disguised to an art movie.

Had to admit, Jared seemed a little shaken too. Filling out the form

of questions wasn't as easy as last time and we spent a good few minutes, thinking them through and searching for rather neutral phrases. We managed, however and as Jared went to return the form to teacher, I could've sworn that the teacher was holding back a smirk.

As I thanked Jared for the company, he hurried to leave the class with me. "Did you see her face," he asked me as we stopped near the lobby. "Yeah. She totally got some kicks out of everybody's reactions," I agreed.

"I was thinking... you are not dating Jonathan, are you?" He asked, gauging for my reply. "No, we aren't. He is my best friend, though," I told him carefully. "Would you like to go out with me sometime? Get a cup of coffee or something?" He smiled and this was probably the first time I saw him slightly nervous.

"Yeah, why not. Let me get back to you about the date later, if you don't mind?" I smiled and Jared seemed relieved. "Great. I'll see you later," he said and left with a smile on his face.

I hadn't seen Jonathan pass by, but then again, I had concentrated pretty much to Jared and his invitation to a date. Oh well, if I wouldn't see him around, I'd just call him later. I left for my dorms, somehow still feeling butterflies in my stomach.

I called to the boys dormitory and waited for a good while until Jonathan got to the phone. "Hey," he gasped. He must have hurried to the phone whereas the other guy definitely hadn't. "Hi, it's me. Wanna go out for evening dinner?" I asked him, knowing he recognized my voice. "Sure. See you out in ten?" He replied. "Yeah, see you soon," I agreed.

If only things were this easy with other people, too, I sighed in my mind and went to get ready. Being with Jonathan was like a fresh breeze. He wasn't overly polite, but still honest and easygoing, when one got familiar with him.

As we walked the familiar way to our usual diner, he was being curious about Jared. "Did he ask you out yet," he inquired. "Yeah, how did you know," I felt surprised. "I thought it was coming soon,"



he shrugged his shoulders. "Feeling excited to go with him?"

"A bit. Today's film was total shocker though, considering..." I admitted and he began to laugh. "Yeah. I wouldn't have had guts after that," he smiled. I was about to ask him if he had been out with anyone since his break-up, but he would've probably told me if he had.

"Do you miss home," I asked instead. "I do. I'm really looking forward for getting to visit. How about you? When do you plan to go next time?" He had clearly wanted to know this.

"Yeah, of course I miss everybody, home and the food, and the sights... but I'll try to save up some money and stay here for holidays, since the flights cost a fortune," I told. It had been the original plan and I'd stick to it, no matter how sad I'd feel sometimes.

"This is actually what I really wanted to talk about with you," Jonathan said. I waited, beckoning him to continue. "Would you... how would it feel if I invited you to come home with me on this next holiday? For Halloween week?"

At first, I was speechless. As if reading my mind, he continued. "My family understands. I've talked about you every now and then in the phone, and the idea of leaving you here, all alone for a week... They consent."

"If you are really, really sure it's okay with your folks, I'd love to come," I told him carefully and a smile lit up his face. I felt just as happy. I wouldn't get to go home, but this was the very unexpected best choice otherwise. "If it's okay with you, I'd like to leave on Friday straight after the classes. It's a long drive," he warned.

"It's alright. I can take my turns to drive, too. You can have some rest on the way," I promised him. He seemed relieved. "I'm happy you are coming with me. And not only because it is a long way to travel alone," he confessed. "Me too," I replied.

My unexpected trip to Hawkins would be just two weeks away now. Now this was news to tell for my folks at home, when I'd call them. Suddenly there was something to wait for.

## 6. Chapter 6

I felt nervous, sitting in the car with Jonathan and leaving New York far behind. "What if your family won't like me," I worried. A week with them would be likely torture, if they didn't.

"Are you kidding me. They know already you are special. I'm not exactly having... never had... too many friends," Jonathan sighed. "I'm sure they'll love you when they get to know you."

We had left early this afternoon, skipping last lesson of today and having extra homework to cover our absence. It gave us a little more time to drive in daylight. Still we would arrive in Hawkins in small hours.

Jonathan would give me his room and he'd stay with Will instead, sleeping on the mattress. He'd said it'd be fun to get to be more with his brother. Even if sleeping on mattress could be hardly described as fun, I knew it was hard for him to study so far away from family and he was really looking forward to spend time with Will.

"You didn't tell me how your date with handsome Jared went," Jonathan glimpsed at me. "Well, most of the time it went just fine," I sighed and he smirked. "Uh-oh. Sounds ominous. What went wrong?"

"He was perfectly nice, and asking me for a dinner and movie again on next week. Since the vacation, free time and all. I told him I couldn't make it next week, because I'd go with you to visit your home," I explained and Jonathan nodded.

"There's no way he'd take you with him, if there wasn't something more going on with you two, you'll be a fool to believe something like that!" I imitated Jared's words, trying to keep my old irritation in bay. By now Jonathan was really working on keeping his face still. "And?" He asked, suspecting this wasn't yet finished.

"After a few more rather insulting hints of the sort of our relationship, I had enough and got up to leave. He finally shut up when I told him it was thanks to his sort of narrow-minded jerks, that now still in twentieth century dormitories of boys and girls had

actually to be kept separated in different buildings," I told him, keeping my tone deceptively light.

Jonathan couldn't keep his laughter inside anymore, and it just bursted out. For a second I worried that we wouldn't stay on the road, but he kept the control otherwise.

On the other hand, it had been some time since I had seen him this open and in the good mood. "Oh my god," he huffed, working to even his breathing. "I almost feel sorry for him. He will either hate you, or beg for mercy at your feet after that roast."

"Speaking of roast, I made us sandwiches and brought some snacks and drinks. You just tell me when you are hungry and or want to switch," I reminded him, changing the subject. "Thanks. There's no need at least yet," he patted my hand.

I had felt worried for him lately. He seemed to have dark rings under his eyes, as if he wasn't sleeping well. He looked slightly thinner, too, shoulders seeming wider. His cheekbones and jaw were sharper. Ever since we'd met, his hair had been growing freely too, and he constantly kept brushing them away from his eyes.

"Something on my face," he inquired, feeling my quiet observation. I told him my thoughts, and he sighed heavily. "I'm not into autumns anymore. Not since my brother's disappearance. I'll probably feel much better by christmas," he said.

When I didn't reply, he forced a smile. "Besides, don't you like my hair like this," he joked. I rolled my eyes back at him. It wasn't about his hair, really. "Don't worry. I'll be right as rain before you know it," he said gently.

"Now, would you arrange us some music please?" I dove into his stash of cassettes, asking how he felt like. "Mix tape, maybe," he said. "Might have something that you like, too." Which effectively lead the topic into the music and well away from his well-being.

After exhausting hours in the car and few switches between us, we were in Hawkins. "Finally, almost home," Jonathan muttered as he drove across the town. It was bigger than I had imagined, already

dark and sleeping.

Soon we were driving a long driveway through the dark forest. A house emerged, still lit up. As Jonathan parked, I saw someone inside flashing briefly in the window. As we stepped out, a young teenager boy and a pretty dark lady dashed out of the front door. "You're home! Welcome!" They ran Jonathan almost over, hugging him.

His mom let go first and came to me, arms open wide. She hugged me too, telling they'd been waiting for us. "I've heard so much about you. Welcome again," she told me as she hugged me. "Thank you, Mrs Byers," I smiled to her. I received scolding right away. "No, none of that polite Mrs Byers -thing, you call me Joyce, you hear," she insisted.

"Thanks a lot... Joyce," I nodded, trying to fit it in my mind. All this time I had thought of her as Mrs Byers. The teenager also turned to say hello, but didn't quite know whether to hug me, so I offered my hand to him instead with a smile and he seemed secretly grateful.

"You must be Will. Nice to meet you too," I said. "You too," he smiled shyly, shaking my hand. His hair was just a shade darker than Jonathan's and they all shared deep brown eyes.

"Will, help Jon with their things. My dear, come in. It won't do for you to catch cold out here on your holiday," Joyce beckoned me to follow. She gave me a quick tour in the house and then led us to kitchen.

"Let's have something to eat. You are earlier than we expected. Did you follow speedlimits," she chatted and kept raising ready dishes from fridge to table. "We left actually a bit earlier from school. And yes, we drove carefully. I drove a little bit, while Jonathan took a nap," I explained.

"That nap lasted at least three hours, because you didn't wake me up so don't downtone it," Jonathan suddenly said behind my back and scared me out. Chuckling at my jump, he came to sit by my side and Will settled on the other side.

"It feels great to have you back here. I got a few days off from work,

so I can spend more time with you. But now, let's eat and then you get to rest! You must be exhausted after all that traveling," Joyce said. They seemed nice, I thought, as I listened for the conversation to go on.

After the dinner I drifted to the Jonathan's bedroom. It felt already familiar and cozy, probably because it was his. Everybody told me many times just to call, if I needed anything. I promised to, although after falling asleep I'd probably sleep like dead.

The bed was freshly made, sheets smelling like fresh laundry and feeling soft. After switching in my nightgown, brushing my teeth and turning lights off, I slid to bed and straight away to dreamless sleep.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Feedback is welcome! :p

## 7. Chapter 7

"Mom, I told you to buy some tea," Jonathan complained in the kitchen, as my mind rose to consciousness. "I forgot, I'm sorry," I faintly heard Joyce answering.

Uh oh. I'd better hurry. I remembered Jonathan telling he usually did the breakfast in the mornings, when he used to live at home. He knew I liked tea better, although in a tight spot I drank coffee too. I was slipping into my clothes as I heard Jonathan knocking to my door, calling for breakfast.

As I went to kitchen, I saw the time. It was past 11! "I can't believe I slept this late," I wondered, finding a seat in the table. "We all did, dear. Yesterday was a tough day for you two. I'm glad you slept well. Jonathan, did you wake up Will," Joyce said. "Yeah, I told him to get up," Jonathan shrugged, filling my coffee cup and passing it to me, rolling his eyes.

Will appeared in his pajamas, still looking sleepy. He sat at the table, immediately slouching. "Good morning," he said to me dutifully before asking for some coffee. "Morning," I agreed while Jonathan poured him a cup.

"I missed your breakfast," Will said to Jonathan. "What's wrong with mine," Joyce pretended hurt. "It's not as abundant," Will wasn't a least bit fooled and smiled back. He was scrawny, and clearly had had a growing spurt. When he smiled, I thought that sometime in the not so distant future girls should beware because he would be a charmer.

The small family kept joking, enjoying their time together again. It was contagious, making me feel happy too. I helped Jonathan with the dishes while Joyce cleaned the table. Will had disappeared to the bathroom. Not a bad plan, I could use a shower too. Last night I had just crawled to the bed as soon as possible.

"Helloooo," I felt Jonathan nudge me. "What?" I returned from my thoughts. "Let's go to the shop in the afternoon. Where were you," he asked, teasing. "Somewhere in another galaxy, maybe," I shrugged.

"Do you mind if I have a shower before we go," I asked and he shook his head. "We've got all the time we want. Except that mom needs some stuff for evening dinner, but otherwise..." he grinned. "Besides I have to go too. Let's hope Will leaves some hot water for us too."

In the afternoon we were in the shop. Will and Joyce had stayed home, doing their own stuff. Jonathan picked up stuff with ease, while I mainly read the short must-have list and wondered. As we were turning to the beverage aisle Jonathan suddenly froze. A pretty brunette girl and a guy turned conveniently and the girl recognized Jonathan.

"Hi, Jon," she exclaimed and came over, dragging the guy along. "Hi, Nance," Jonathan said. Holy shit, this was his ex! "I didn't know you were back. How are you? Who's this," she singsonged, barely even looking at me. Before I had a chance to say anything, Jonathan was on it.

"This is my girl friend from NYU. She's an exchange student," he explained reluctantly, but somehow his hand had found mine, and his touch was crushing. "Oh. Do you speak english," she addressed me for the first time, while the guy made an overly excited question how was New York.

"Yeah, NYU and the city have been just wonderful! Jonathan has been most helpful ever since my first day. A real gentleman," I chirped back happily, looking at Jonathan tenderly and leaning closer to him, effectively hiding his death grip behind our backs.

Nancy seemed as she had been electrocuted, and backed off a little bit. "How nice. I'm afraid we're somewhat in a hurry. See you later," her tone was definitely cooler as they turned to go hastily and she still seemed to drag him along. We stood on the place like statues, Jonathan still looking in the direction where the couple had fled.

"Jonathan? Are you alright? Did I overdo it?" I whispered to him. He turned to me, looking relieved. "I'm sorry," he apologized, returning my hand after rubbing it and I tried not to wince. "Did you really just introduce me as your girlfriend," I asked him, puzzled.

"I didn't mean it originally like that, and as I realized what I had said,

I panicked," he said quietly, turning hastily to collect rest of the stuff we had come for. I didn't want to push him, so I stayed quiet and simply stuck along.

In the parked car he finally opened up again. "I'm sorry," he said again. "I know you know I wasn't totally over her yet. I just worry about the gossip spreading. Thanks for covering me, though." He stared at the wheel.

"I didn't lie with a single word. I didn't know what you would have preferred, but her behaviour felt rude, and I ended up adding just a bit more than I intended for," I explained. For the first time since leaving the shop, he smiled. "Now I have to tell mom and Will again that we are just friends, no matter what they hear from town."

"Perhaps I should have emphasized your success and our fancy school," I thought aloud. What he said next surprised me. "Nope, I think I prefer them wondering how freaky loner Jonathan Byers dates now a beautiful girl from abroad."

I couldn't think of a thing to say back to that.



## 8. Chapter 8

On monday afternoon, phone rang. Joyce talked for a while, and turned to living room after the call. "Jim Hopper and El are coming later to visit," she announced.

I raised my eyes from the book, and Jonathan explained they were family friends, Jim being chief of police in the town and his adopted daughter Jane, whom everybody usually just called El.

I offered to bake something with the coffee and it seemed to make Joyce very happy. She came to keep me company and help out. "I'm a lousy baker," she complained. I tried to tell her I wasn't really that good either, until I had practised a lot. We had plenty to talk about, enjoying time between women.

In the evening I was mainly hanging out with the others. After a while El and Will had disappeared somewhere together, while Jim, Jonathan and Joyce were deep in the conversation. I thought about the relationship between Jim and Joyce. They seemed somehow special together but the signals were mixed. Perhaps it was somewhere in their history. They could be a good couple, though.

Jim was the tallest and burliest man I had seen for a while. El... she smiled and was pretty quiet. I thought she was beautiful, and she probably had a strong character too, if I could judge anything from her adoptive father. She had barely said hello, and then already gone to hang out with Will.

"So how do you like Hawkins and the States," Jim asked me for a change and my chain of thoughts snapped. He laughed first at my polite answers, but kept inquiring my opinions about everything and asking how things were in my country.

In the end I began to be secretly exhausted, after talking so much and answering all those questions. Then again it made me happy that they were being considerate and not leaving me as an outsider.

After few hours they left, thanking immensely for company and coffee. I had concentrated a lot, feeling tired. Jonathan understood

quite well, and I slipped quietly to my room. Slowly the house began to calm down, as the family began to prepare for the night. I fell asleep.

I woke up in a dark room, realizing it was my own screaming that was waking me up. In a minute Jonathan rushed into the room, finding me still shaky. I heard others moving too, so I told Jonathan it was okay, it had been just a nightmare. He went out, telling on a low voice it was nothing Will and Joyce should be concerned about and that the others could go back to bed.

He came back, settling by my side and pulled me into his lap. "What was it, I've never seen or heard you like this," he whispered. I leaned against his chest, feeling safer. His white t-shirt smelled like faintly like washing detergent, mixed with his scent.

"I was in a place unlike I have ever been in my dreams before. It was like being in pitch black darkness, and only light was somehow surrounding me, but I couldn't see its source. There was water in my feet, but it didn't move or even feel wet. It was horribly empty space, and I was alone," I told him, whispering.

"And the most ridiculous part," I mumbled, worrying how Jonathan would take it and yet I couldn't lie to him. "You came..." "Me?" He wondered aloud, his hand stopping on my back.

"You walked to me from darkness, and claimed it was all over. That I was delusional to think anything could ever be between us, when it was clear you should be with Nancy. She was far better for you and I just used you. You told me to get lost where I came from, and turned away. I tried to run after you, but you disappeared in the dark and it was like something invisible chained me still, stopping me from going anywhere. I was alone. That's when I screamed," I confessed him.

"That's just nonsense, I'd never say anything like that to you," he said but sounded somehow worried, holding me tighter. "I know, but it was scary... and it felt so real! I've never seen a dream that felt like this. That's the scariest thing," I tried to keep the welling tears in my eyes.

"Shhh, listen. I'm staying here for now and as long as you want to. I'm

right here with you," he whispered. "I don't want you to go anywhere," he said and I quietly thought the same about him.

"What about your folks," I whispered. We both wore pyjamas, but he had closed the door after him. "I don't care," he said back quietly. He changed his position to be more comfortable and I covered us both better with a blanket.

Eventually we fell asleep again together, while he was still holding me close.

## 9. Chapter 9

We woke up near the dawn in the morning. We had been sleeping comfortably tangled together, as if we did that every night. When I opened my eyes, Jonathan was right there awake and stroking my back gently. I smiled to him, studying his dark brown eyes.

He winked at me, messed my hair and got silently up. There was no sound at all as he opened and closed the door, moving like a ghost. He probably would still have a nap in Will's room. I didn't feel that sleepy anymore, so I continued the book I was reading.

I was grateful nobody asked of last night and I thought I had survived. Later in the afternoon Joyce left for work and Jonathan was fixing something in the back yard. Will came to find me, seeming somehow strange and bothered. He asked me for a walk because he'd like to talk about something.

As soon as we were out, he apologized. "I'm sorry about the last night's nightmare," he said, head hanging down. "Will, it's alright. Definitely not your fault," I told him. "But it is. At least partly," he replied, gravely serious. "How on earth could it be?" I wondered.

"Because you met Nancy in the shop. She was upset and told Mike, who told El and me. El adores Nancy. So if you were a threat to her..." Will explained, looking bothered. "El won't like me because of Nancy? So what? How is my nightmare your fault then?" I persisted.

"Because I too wanted to find out how you really felt about my brother. I suggested this to El. As soon as I heard you scream like that, I knew she had gone way too far. And Jonathan kept me a really serious talk this morning. He knew for sure I was a part of this and warned me to never do it again," Will nearly sobbed.

I still tried to put pieces together. "So my dream was somehow... what? Magical? It had something to do with El?" I asked and Will nodded, avoiding my eyes. Was he kidding, no way anyone could do that? Did they? Really? I pushed the thought aside to be pondered more later.

"If you wanted to know how I feel about your brother, why didn't you just ask me?" I threw out a next question. "Would you have told me honestly?" Will asked me back. I looked at him sarcastically and he understood.

"So do you date for real?" Now he insisted on finding out the truth. "No. Although we do lots of homeworks together and spend a lot of free time together too," I explained.

"Do you sleep together? Like... have... you know," he asked, blushing red. "No," I replied and tried to resist smiling. "What about last night? Do you love him?" He pinched his mouth shut after getting it all out and stopped still to observe me. I stopped too.

"Will. Nothing happened last night. And yes, I do love him. I don't know if there's any romantic shades, but what I know for sure, is that he is one of the most special persons I have ever met. I think he's been through a lot, probably more than any ordinary people and I don't even know half of it. In fact like you, I think." By now I really thought Will had his own big secret. But he still listened, and I wasn't finished.

"I hate it that his heart was broken. If I could, I'd do everything in my power to heal it. I value his wit, kindness and talent. He doesn't mind hard work. He was my first friend here and what's most important, most loyal so far. So can you understand why I too, can say I love him?" I asked Will back, looking at so deceptively familiar shade of eyes.

"I... I think so. Thank you," Will said, surprised. If he had been thinking lots of stuff before, now those thoughts had seemed to change into new ones. We arrived soon at the small hut in the woods, covered with branches. "What's this," I asked. "Castle Byers," Will answered happily. "It was my own place to stay."

It was pretty neat and I asked Will's permission if I could look inside. "Why couldn't you," he wondered. "Friends welcome," I nodded towards the sign. "Oh, right... of course. Do you happen to know Lord of the rings?" He turned to ask me with a grin, crouching to get inside.

"I do. Why?" I asked him back. "The password is a wizard's name, can you guess it?" Will smiled. "Well, first there would be Gandalf The Grey," I thought but Will shook his head. "And his opposite, Saruman The White?" I guessed but Will shook his head again, eyes now shining with the excitement over our game.

"Um... there was then this one wizard... who was really into nature..." Gears were turning in my mind as I looked around me. "Radagast The Brown!"

"Yessss!" Will laughed and invited me in. The place was surprisingly big. An adult would fit to sleep straight in here, if one wanted to. "I like this place," I told him, sitting down. It was a greatest little hut I had ever seen. "Jonathan built it with me from my blueprints," Will answered proudly.

"It's been a while since I came here last time," Will said, tone changing. "Something to do with your growing up or with your disappearance," I asked before it occurred to me it might be a sore subject. Will nodded thoughtfully, not specifying which.

To ease up the atmosphere, I asked him if he liked Narnia too. "Did you know that Tolkien and C.S. Lewis were friends? They just had quite different insights what one should write as a fantasy," I said and soon we were caught in a deep conversation.

When we got cold, we left back to the house. In the midway Jonathan ran towards us, fuming. Will and I looked into each other, knowing we were in deep shit now. "You can't just leave like that," Jonathan yelled. "Do you realize how worried I was!" His face began to turn red. I had never seen him so angry and Will winced.

"Sorry. We had unfinished business," I told him coolly. He stopped to stare at us. I offered my hand to be shaken by Will and he shook it, surprised at the gesture. "And now it is concluded," I said with a finishing tone, smiling seriously to Will, who still held on. He smiled back like a good co-conspirator and for once Jonathan was speechless.

I changed my hand and turned to walk back towards the house, holding still Will's hand in mine. I turned back to wave my free hand

for Jonathan, who was still so astonished that he momentarily forgot his anger. "You're studying the wrong thing," I heard Will say under his breath and I turned to see him. "You should become a defence lawyer." He grinned at me.

"What were you talking about," Jonathan insisted, hurrying behind us. "Stuff. Life. Books," Will said, shrugging his shoulders. "Secrets," I added winking my eye, making Will giggle.

"Uhh. I don't think I want to know," Jonathan groaned, shaking his head.

## 10. Chapter 10

Wednesday evening was really pretty and clear. I let the dog out, took my thick coat and went to sit on the porch while poochie was sniffing around in my line of sight. It was wonderful to have a dog around. I missed that too from home.

I enjoyed watching the stars. Here in Hawkins you could see them so much better than in the city filled with lights reflecting to the sky. Even the dark forest surrounding the house didn't feel menacing in the beautiful light.

In a moment door opened and Jonathan came out. He sat by my side and gave me a cup of hot chocolate. "Aren't you cold," he asked. I shook my head. "Thanks for warm-up, though," I smiled.

I had loved being here instead of trying to kill time at the university on my own. Jonathan had been right, it wasn't a big or fancy house, but the family in it made it so cozy.

Will and Joyce really began to be natural around me now. I felt especially happy about Will, we had connected quite well after our talk in the forest. He had asked me a strange question today though. "If you could be friends with David Bowie or with Kenny Rogers, who would it be?"

"I've no idea who Kenny Rogers even is. Never heard of him. But I think I'd like David Bowie anyway," I told him and for some reason his eyes lit up with happiness, even though he refused to explain anything more about his odd question.

"What are you thinking of? You're really quiet," Jonathan glimpsed at me. I told him and he seemed pleased. "Wow, I'm surprised anyone feels this way about being in Hawkins, compared to all things in New York," he said, chuckling.

"I guess it reminds me of being home and about my family. But I think you knew that when you invited me," I told him. He shrugged. "I didn't know this trip would actually turn out this well, except that one..." He couldn't finish his sentence but I guessed what he had been



about to say. Yeah, that night with my nightmare.

I wondered if it had even been a dream, but Will and Jonathan didn't seem to want to talk about it or El anymore. Weird. But maybe it was about those secrets that they seemed to have.

But then again, it had been so intimate to be so close to Jonathan and... maybe he regretted it? We hadn't really done anything, but... It had felt so secure to be in his arms, as if we had done it thousand times. Sure, we were more comfortable touching each other now. Not that it crossed any real borders.

"So, wanna go tomorrow," he asked and I replied automatically okay. "You liar. Did you even listen what I said," he nudged me. "What?" I asked, realizing he was right. He sighed. "Do you want to go out tomorrow? See halloween at the town, catch a movie and dinner?" He was practically a human lie detector. He always knew when I was out of grid. Well, not only me but other people as well.

"Sure," I said. "Alright then. If you don't mind, I'll give Will a ride as well. He's bound to hang out with his friends," Jonathan said. I had seen one or two out of them quickly, but we hadn't really talked except for saying hello. "Of course." I didn't mind. Jonathan whistled the dog to us, and we went in.

"Would you like to come here for Christmas as well," Jonathan said, surprising me. "But what about Joyce and Will, surely they want to spend some holidays with you, without me butting in every time," I asked him quietly as I went to take my empty cup to the kitchen and gave it a quick wash.

"Nonsense, they have been happy to have you around. Mom loves it that she doesn't have to cook all the time and having someone to share some feminine talk with as well," Jonathan argued. As I slipped in to my temporary room, Jonathan followed, shut the door and put some music on.

"Will likes you too, although he begins to be too much of a teen to say it out loud," he threw himself on side to the bed. "Okay, I'll think about it," I promised just to get the talk over with.

But really, the idea was tempting.

## 11. Chapter 11

As we were out with Jonathan, I realized he was looking really good with his natural white sweater and dark jacket. He'd been teasing me about calling Jared handsome, but I hadn't thought before that he was actually pretty good-looking guy as well.

For some reason my throat felt dry when we dropped Will off at the Wheeler's house and I thought about our previous encounter with Nancy. I wondered if she still lived at home, but I didn't want to ask it from Jonathan.

He drove us to the town center, and we went to see one of the movies running in the theatre. We shared a drink together, not bothering to buy popcorn since we were headed for dinner after.

As we were leaving the theatre, someone called after Jonathan. We turned and a guy in denim and perfectly styled brown hair hurried after us. "I thought it was you," he said when he walked to us.

"Hi Steve, how are you doing," Jonathan said neutrally. It was hard to say if he was excited or not to see this guy, not that this Steve seemed to even notice. "Good, all good. Working for my father nowadays. But is this girl the one I've been hearing rumours about," he winked at me mischievously. A cute guy but such a flirt!

"I don't know. Whatcha been hearing then," I asked innocently and this time saw Jonathan trying to hide an amused twitch in his mouth. "That this fella brought a foreign girl with him for a holiday. Didn't think you were this pretty though, you're like way over his class," Steve claimed, his eyes checking me out from head to toes.

This time my hand found Jonathans. "I think he is just classy enough," I smiled brightly to Jonathan and he responded back likewise. Steve seemed surprised by this and Jonathan took the chance to excuse us, leading us out and towards the restaurant.

When we had ordered, he told he had somewhat complicated history with Steve and thanked me for sticking to his side. I waved away his thanks, but his eyes couldn't hide the fact he was satisfied.

"I almost feel like I am using you, the way my points are rising in the town gossip. He was totally into you," he grinned. "Then you better stay this classy," I joked back and he laughed.

"I didn't think you honestly cared," I said more seriously and he rolled his eyes. "I don't. I think it's plain stupid. Who cares who is with whom and what people think," he admitted. "So what makes Steve and Nancy so special," I asked.

"They are kind of exceptions. Steve was always sort of my opposite in everything. Popular, wealthy... He practically used to be king of high school. But actually, he dated Nancy too. Before me, you know. And the reason why I care about Nancy... well, you know..." Jonathan squirmed. "Oh," I understood.

I couldn't be angry with him, when I kind of knew how he felt. I had been through with similar situations when it came to people. It was a dog eat dog world there, especially in the time around high school. But I kept secretly wondering about Nancy sometimes.

I enjoyed our time and evening together, seeing the town alive with little trick and treaters and their companions. Jonathan would come back later for Will. He'd promised to call when Jonathan could pick him up from Wheelers. For now we'd go home.

Rest of the evening was relaxing, taking it easy. We watched old movies from tv, leaning to each other on the sofa and talking about anything and everything. Before long, I fell asleep against him while we still waited the call from Will.

The phone rang in the small hours and Jonathan was awake immediately. He jumped to answer, and his tone grew angry when he saw what time it was. I got up and he finished the call. "Go to bed. I'll go to pick him up. We'll be back soon," he said to me quietly.

"Right," I yawned and walked to my room to continue my sleep. If he promised, surely they'd be back soon. Why not? But for some reason I kept waiting for them unconsciously, drifting between awake and sleep until I heard the car doors slammed shut, right outside in the front yard.

## 12. Chapter 12

On Saturday evening we were finally back at the university. When I and Jonathan separated between our dormitories, he hugged me for a long time. It was beginning to be a habit for us now.

"Thanks for taking me along," I whispered, holding on to him and smelling his familiar scent. "Thanks for coming. This was a pretty special holiday," he said back and looked at me while we separated.

"You sure you can handle it all," he asked doubtfully while I picked up my stuff, his cassette player amongst my bags. "Am fine!" I huffed, lifting one bag on my shoulder and began walking. As I turned to look behind, I saw him going his own way and turning to check my direction. "Nights," I yelled to him and he waved back, smiling.

The trip to Hawkins had been awesome. In a sense it had been so ordinary, but then again it had changed a lot. I had gotten a lot closer to Jonathan and his family was wonderful. Joyce had insisted that we'd leave with clean clothes, so she'd made sure all laundry was done before we left. And she'd packed us food and snacks for the travel.

Even Will had hugged me when we were leaving. He was slightly taller than me, I had realized. "Come back sometimes. Bring my brother too, if you want to," he had joked and earned a friendly punch from Jonathan. "Take care," I told him. "Spare me a good book or two, if you read any," I said and he promised to, eyes twinkling.

In fact, as I was planning to unpack and opening my bags, I found some things that weren't mine. Chocolate, mixtapes and a well-read book. Lord of the rings! This was surely some co-op stunt Byers' had pulled together and I loved it. I had borrowed some shirts from Jonathan as well. New York was sometimes freezing.

Jonathan had been taking a break after driving few hours. I had switched to driver's place and told him to take my pillow out of the top of bag and get comfortable. "What kind of person brings a pillow all the way from another country," he pretended to complain as he put pillow under his head and rolled it to get a nice relaxed position.

"Come on, it is the most personal and comfortable thing I could bring," I pretended hurt. "It rhymes! Thing you could bring," he said, teasing. "And I swear it's true, it smells like you," he sniffed at the pillow dramatically.

"Careful now, or I might end up choking you in your sleep," I warned him, smiling. "I mean it smells good and lovely, no need to be offended," he said, trying to be serious and failing. "Right. Just go to sleep already," I chuckled at him.

I had gotten a lot of good memories. They made me smile as I went to gather and check the notes that had been just pushed under the door to my room. Well well.

First notes said Jared had called twice on last friday evening. Another ones were newer, informing me of few other missed calls from Jared. I guess he'd tried again yesterday. A few invitations to Halloween parties that I'd missed. Then I found a another envelope. It had a pretty card inside.

The card said:

'I'm sorry for being such an idiot last time we saw each other. Call me please when you come back.

-Jared

Ps. Went to that coffeeshop we visited. Coffee tasted strange compared to previous times.'

I couldn't hold off my laughter when I read about the coffeeshop part. Poor guy. Someone there must have been listening the last time we were there together and the way he lost his temper. And now that someone was... shit. Maybe I should go there and have a very careful kind word with someone.

But I thought I'd call him tomorrow. All I wanted now was to get a quick wash and get to bed. However, as I had gone to shower and changed to my nighties, I heard a knock on my door. I got up, still trying to dry my long hair.

"Hey," Jared said softly as I opened up and stayed standing in the doorway. He looked surprised when he saw my state and then seemed to understand. "I saw Jonathan in the dorms and..." he cleared his throat.

I secretly wondered if he had left same amount of messages to him too. "I just wanted you to know I'm so sorry about the things I said to you. I know I was rude..." he hurried to say, distressed.

"It's okay," I told him, stopping his flow of words. "Really?" He asked, and suddenly trapped me into a passionate bear hug. "Really," I tapped his shoulder and he let go. "Sorry, I just..." he seemed confused.

"You must be tired," he said and I nodded. "It was a long ride," I confirmed. "I was going to call you tomorrow morning," I told him and his face brightened.

"I worried you wouldn't speak at all to me anymore," he said. This definitely wasn't the cool and collected Jared I normally knew. "Well..." I had no idea what to say. I hadn't been that mad at him.

"I'll see you at school. I hope we'll talk more then. Sleep well," he said gently and turned to leave as suddenly as he had arrived. At least he had been truly sorry, I thought as I shut the door, turned off the lights and slid under the covers, damp hair or not.

It was clear he was having a lot of feelings and of course it was sweet and flattering. But he had clearly an jealous side, too, and when he had lost his nerve his tongue had been sharp.

Eventually I fell asleep, embracing darkness and forgetfulness of dreams.

## 13. Chapter 13

In the next two weeks I pretty much ended up sharing my free time between Jonathan and Jared. If I wasn't alone, I was almost always with one of them. Except that being with Jared was turning more and more romantic while being with Jonathan was carefree and relaxing, even if we were working with homework.

One saturday afternoon I was taking photos with Jonathan in the Central park. We alternated between modeling, when and if it was necessary, although both of us felt way more cozier behind the camera than in the front of it. I had taken some pictures with Jared too, but it was easier with Jonathan when we both knew each others styles and preferences.

"So how are you two doing together? Is he still jealous about us," Jonathan asked while we walked together, searching for fresh spots for pictures and enjoying the crispy autumn air.

"Well, he is sort of trying to avoid it. And um... I don't know... I wonder if this all is going to work out. Between me and him, I mean," I searched for right words. But in the end I told him everything, as always.

Actually it had been just yesterday when we had gone out. He'd taken me out to late dinner and afterwards we'd gone walking. We'd passed a bar, and spontaneously decided to go in and dancing.

We took a couple of drinks and it was all fun. By the time we danced the first slow song, he was already quite drunk, but I had been more careful and still more in my senses. We had kissed during that dance, and the way he pulled me closer let me understand he was quite ready for more.

The problem was that I wasn't. The kiss was good, he was gentle, and didn't push limits any more than that, but... Something about that kiss was unsatisfactory and a part of me was left cold.

It bothered me and soon I felt like ready to go home. He was just getting started, having fun and didn't feel like leaving yet. So I kissed



his cheek and told him goodnight, and went out to get a cab.

"And so you left?" Jonathan asked, eyes open wide. "And so I left," I confirmed. "Next time if you don't get a cab, just call me," he said. "That's what worries you most?" I was outraged, barely understanding his first reaction.

"No, I think it's good that you did what felt right," he said anxiously. "I mean... He just stayed happily behind?" I shook my head. "No, of course he kept asking me to stay, but I had made up my mind," I explained.

"What do you think it would be like to be his girlfriend?" Jonathan asked in an indifferent manner, trying to hide that he was annoyed. "I don't know. But maybe it just wasn't right, because he was too much in sauce," I wondered.

"Even Steve Harrington 'in sauce' would take better care of you," Jonathan muttered. "Well, too bad he ain't here to date me then," I grunted back. It wasn't his business to decide who was good enough to date me.

It was odd, that we felt so irritated with each other suddenly. "Really," Jonathan turned to see me in shock. "No! Do you honestly think I'd want your ex's leftovers," I said angrily before I realized what I had said.

Jonathan stood still as if he had been slapped. I just might have. "Jon, I'm sorry. I didn't mean you," I tried to explain. "I know," he said weakly, and I knew I had hit sorest possible spot. "Jonathan, I am so sorry. Forgive me please," I found myself begging, taking a step closer to him. How had we come to this?

As tears were about to burst from my eyes, Jonathan took my hand. "You are one mean bitch," he said, squeezing a weak smile. I began to smile and the tears came pouring. "I know," I breathed before he hugged me.

"Now sit down there on the end of bench, wrap your arms around your feet and stare away. Open your hair. I want to take a picture, so perfectly good tears don't go to waste," he said and I knew we were

good again and back in the working mode.

## 14. Chapter 14

Next wednesday Jonathan didn't come to the lessons. He hadn't called that he was sick, and I was sure that he would have told me even if he wouldn't have informed teachers about his absence. But even teachers didn't know where he was. In fact, they kept asking me if he was alright.

I couldn't handle it anymore in the early afternoon. When I finished the art history lesson, I packed my stuff and decided to skip last lessons.

I headed straight into boys dorms, and made it to Jonathan's room door. I knocked and waited. No answer. I knocked more forcefully again and yelled his name. "Go away," I heard a faint answer. "And the fuck I will. I can do this all day. Open up and maybe I'll go after an explanation," I yelled back.

"Whatever," I heard and after a moment he came just to unlock the door, opened it up a sliver and backed off to the bed where he had been clearly sitting all day with a blanket around him. The room was unusually messy, curtains closed and he wore pajamas.

"Jonathan? What's wrong with you? Why didn't you call me or to school you weren't coming?" I asked him and felt even more concerned. His eyes were red-rimmed and his hair was a total mess.

"Nancy called yesterday," he told me with apathetic voice. The hell? Nancy? Why? "She wants me to come home for thanksgiving, if I want to try again with her," he explained. Ohhh shit. Now I got it.

"I don't know what to do. I don't want to do another mistake with her. I want to go and then again I really don't," he whined, burying his face to his hands. I went to him and put my hands around him. "I don't know what I want," he said, leaning to my shoulder.

"Have you eaten or had anything to drink today," I asked him gently. He shook his head. I stroked his back. "Give me your keys. I'll go and order us some food. I'll be back in a jiffy," I promised and left to lobby, where they kept the phones.

In thirty minutes someone knocked on the door. "Your delivery, miss," I heard. I hurried to open and gave a very generous tip. "Thanks, Alessandro. I owe you," I told to familiar italian restaurant keeper. "Not at all," he said with his strong accent. "Take care and come to visit us again," he said. "I will. And I will do my best to advertise you to my friends," I promised as I closed the door again.

I saw Jonathan asking the silent question, but he was too tired to ask it aloud. "I got inspired to take some photos of his restaurant after I ate most amazing portion there. We talked a lot, especially about Europe, and he really took a shine with me," I told Jonathan.

I uncovered two steaming hot giant-sized portions of pasta and stuck a plastic fork straight into another one. "Eat," I commanded him and he took the portion. First he ate slowly and then after a while with more vigor. "What is this," he wondered and I knew he liked it. "Smoked reindeer meat crumbled in cream sauce," I answered. "It tastes like home," I added.

"Aren't you eating," Jonathan asked. "I ate at school and I'm not hungry yet. I will have some scraps later," I shrugged. "Try the other one too. It's wild hog meat in tomato sauce. That's my other favourite," I urged him and took big mineral water bottles out from the bag. For now I left a bottle of red wine still in there. It had been the actual favour from Alessandro to me.

Jonathan clearly felt better after eating and drinking. He had gotten some colour on his cheeks. To my alarm I saw he had lost weight again. He had been a lot better during our halloween holiday, but he must have slowly slipped back to eating too little after that.

As he lied down on the bed, I lied down next to him. "So, start from beginning," I told him. And he began to speak, staring at the ceiling and holding my hand.

Essentially, Nancy had gotten real jealous after meeting us in the shop and decided that she wanted to try again relationship with Jonathan. Her condition was that he'd break up with me and drive home for thanksgiving. What she didn't know was that I wasn't really Jonathan's girlfriend.

I couldn't understand why Joyce hadn't corrected her. Nancy had most likely talked with her in order to get the number to the boys dormitory. Jonathan suspected that his mom was still angry to Nancy for breaking his heart, when they broke up and that's why she hadn't told the truth for her.

I wondered quietly myself why Jonathan hadn't corrected her, either. But we couldn't probably stay even friends if he wanted to try again with her. In that case it wouldn't matter what kind of relationship we had.

"Even if we are just friends, I don't want to give you up," Jonathan said and I felt moved. "You didn't let go of me, even when it almost costed you a relationship with Jared," he continued. I shrugged. Jared wasn't worth it, if I should have ended my friendship with Jonathan.

I wondered quietly, if it was all he meant to me. What if he decided still to get back with Nancy? It somehow horrified me. He had suffered so much. "What should I do," Jonathan wondered. "I don't know," I whispered.

"I know I promised to you to spend thanksgiving here in New York with you," he said, staring at the ceiling. "You do what you need to do," I told him honestly and turned to my side facing him.

He turned too, facing me back. "I'm going in circles. Remember when I slept with you when you had your nightmare at our house," he asked and looked me into my eyes. "How could I forget," I smiled and wiped away strand of hair away from his eyes. "Wanna take a nap with me," he asked and pulled me closer, just like we had been then in his bed.

"Sure," I whispered and my pulse silently sped up. He was so close that our foreheads almost touched each other. He seemed satisfied and closed his eyes. I did the same and soon our breaths became synchronized. He smelled like himself and I liked it. Before I realized it, I relaxed and fell asleep in his arms.

## 15. Chapter 15

I woke up in the darkening room. For a while I didn't remember where I was and it scared me, until I felt familiar arms around me. I tried to carefully get away, but he tightened his grip. "Please don't go," he mumbled quietly. "I won't, if you don't want me to," I answered to him before I realized what I had promised.

I went back down on my side and I saw his eyes were open. "What time is it," I asked him. "Almost seven in the evening," he answered and I understood he'd been awake a lot longer than me. He'd just been quiet and thinking.

"You know the scar in my left hand?" He asked out of blue. "Yeah," I replied, wondering. He had never wanted to talk about it. "She has a similar scar in her hand. We made them together. For a long while, I thought it was my physical tie to Nancy. It was like a wedding ring, something unique that just we shared," he said and I nodded to let him know I was listening.

"I've thought now that it wasn't like that to her anyway. It was only her sacrifice to find her friend and not to me, just like mine was in reality my sacrifice to find Will and not to her," he kept explaining.

"It hurt me so much when everything began to change for worse between us. For the first time I started to understand how much had happened and it still couldn't keep us together. Her break-up with Steve had been really ugly and it made me afraid. I couldn't let go of her. But eventually she made it clear she didn't want to be with me anymore." I saw his eyes were almost in tears.

"It made me crazy. I still loved her. Only reason for me to get up in the mornings was because of mom and Will. They kept urging me to go to full-time work and save for university. 'It's your dream! Go and prove the whole town wrong, and get yourself to NYU! Get a scholarship! Save money and don't worry about us! We'll be right here.' They kept kicking me forward. And this autumn has been most amazing if I don't count being far away from my family," he told and by now I was agreeing. I felt the same. I missed my family too, but this had been a chance of a lifetime.

"You know what. I'm not going home for thanksgiving. Screw her and her demands," Jonathan said and I saw his eyes sparkle with determination. "It's over," he declared. "Now, is that a bottle of red wine I see in that paper bag?" He got up to light a small nightlight before going towards the bag.

I was totally dumbfounded. Now this came out of nowhere. Jonathan was already reaching for the bottle. "Those must have been some hell of a shots for him to bring you wine," he said and started to search for an opener. "Go see yourself. They are on the wall of restaurant, framed," I told him weakly. I heard a pop and I saw him take a sip straight out of bottle.

"To my freedom!" He smiled happily and passed the bottle to me, sitting next to me. "To your freedom," I agreed and took a drink. In two hours we were happily drunk and contents of bottle was practically gone. The mood had totally changed towards upbeat.

Until Jonathan asked me to stay for a night. "What? I can't. It's against the rules," I blurted out in shock. "Who cares? It's not like they are going to kick us out. I like having you around. And now that we are at it, we could skip tomorrow too," he said.

"What's gone to you?" I wondered aloud. "Freedom," he grinned and something clicked in me. Something important. "Wait a moment. I'll be back, I swear," I told him and hastily left the room.

It took me a moment to remember where Jared lived. I knocked on his door and his roommate opened. "Jared, it's your favourite girl," he smirked. "What is it? Whoa, are you drunk?" He wondered. "Yeah, a little and I seriously need to talk to you about something," I said.

"Listen, if this is about that evening in the bar..." Jared said and there was an interesting guilty tone in his voice. I blinked in surprise and some devil in me made me nod vigorously. "I didn't know Nicky would be there and try to hit me, and that dance meant absolutely nothing, if she said anything..." he explained uneasily.

"I'm sorry, but I'm breaking up with you," I said abruptly. I hadn't planned to say it like this, but it served my purpose just fine now that I heard about Nicky. She hadn't told me jack.

"I'm sorry, I just was too wasted," Jared said and seemed really, truly sorry. "I don't need excuses like that. They don't change anything," I said colder than I had intended. "I wish you had told me straight away," I told him and now I too felt a little sad.

But I turned away, and he stayed behind, staring the floor. I made my way through the building and went back to Jonathan's room. Door was open and I locked it. Room was empty. Where had he gone? I sat on his bed. Suppose he'd turn up.

After ten minutes he showed up, with another bottle of wine and box of chocolate. He was wearing still his pajamas, and he had just pulled his jacket and shoes on. I couldn't help giggling, when I saw his appearance. "What? This is New York. Nobody cares," he grinned. "Did you manage your business?"

"I did. It was easy and sort of surprising," I told him and he was already opening another bottle of wine. "Did you go to kiss Jared for another time? To find out if it was any better?" Jonathan inquired, pokerface on again, disguising how he felt.

"No. I actually found out he sort of cheated on me and he revealed it all by himself," I said and Jonathan almost choked on the sip he was taking. "What the hell," got out of his mouth when he could breathe again. I explained and by the time I told him how I was breaking up with Jared, Jonathan's jaw had dropped.

"What?" He asked, still trying to sort it all out in his head. I pronounced it all again very clearly. "It's your fault, really," I said lightly and took a good drink myself from the bottle. "That freedom shit was pretty catchy. I definitely got infected."

He began to laugh and dropped to lie down on his bed. "And you just nodded at him," he wiped tears from his eyes. "Yup," I told and smiled myself. A small part of me was still sad, but in my head I knew this was a good decision in a long run. I didn't wanna be a cheater myself and if I was gonna do what I wanted to do...

"Jonathan?" I asked and he lifted his head up. "Yeah?" He asked, aware of my mood change. "I didn't want to try to experiment that kiss with Jared," I told him as I sat next to him. "I'd like to find out



how it feels to kiss you," I confessed.

Before I knew it, he had sat up, leaned closer and sunk his brown eyes on mine. "Are you sure," he whispered so close to my skin that I thought I'd faint. I leaned closer myself while my blood raced through my whole body and our lips met.

## 16. Chapter 16

As our lips met, we both leaned even closer. What had been a light touch between us, got even more intense. It was like drug, taking over and beginning to live its own life, as I studied every bit of his lips with mine. It was finally feeling right, this was what I had yearned for.

Jonathan pulled away first. "So how was it," he asked even though I saw his red cheeks and the way his eyes shined. "Oh, I don't know. Is this the best you've got," I tried to stay cool on the outside.

He grunted and pulled me on top of him, claiming me again and rolling then on top himself. All the while his mouth was working on mine, no more gentle but skillfully forcing my mouth to open along with his.

He then moved to my jawline, making a trail with burning kisses towards my neck, making me moan aloud. I had a feeling he was on the verge of losing control himself.

"How's that then," he whispered on my neck before kissing it one more time. I couldn't say anything back, he had left me gasping. My whole body screamed silently for more. "I didn't know friends kiss like that," I groaned as a dim spark of reason was still left working in my mind.

"I didn't think you'd ever see me as anything else than a friend," Jonathan sighed, letting go and turned to lie on his back, staring at the ceiling. "I thought you really wanted Nancy back," I moaned.

"My hurt ego wanted it. I didn't know I had really other options than that or staying alone. When I told you about the scars in our hands, that was me dropping her finally off the pedestal I had raised her on," he began to explain. "Besides you made it very clear you didn't want any of her leftovers," he added with slight bitterness.

"I don't. But understand, you are nothing like that. You are the best thing, and much more than I ever expected to find from States," I said sincerely, turning to lean on him. "Why did you want to kiss me," he

whispered, still doubtful.

"Because the moment when you asked me to stay for a night, it felt... I wanted to. Without any ties to anybody else. I knew then things would never work out with Jared," I tried to explain. What I didn't say aloud was that... that was the moment when I realized I loved Jonathan.

"Come here," he asked me. I crawled closer, and he pulled me into a familiar embrace. "Does this mean you really wanna be together with me?" He asked seriously. "Yeah," I breathed and he kissed me again and it was even better than before. I sunk my fingers in his hair, pulling him closer. He tasted like wine and his tongue was doing incredible things.

I don't know how long we stayed like that, kissing and enjoying this new dimension of each other. As we finally separated, I told him I had nothing with me considering that I'd stay for night. He got up and went for his closet. He showed me a set of old worn out pyjamas and I took them, going to his small bathroom.

I did what I could to clean up a bit and changed into his nighties. As I got out, he took his turn and I slid under the covers in his bed. I felt hot, so I ditched the bottoms. It felt more comfortable to just have the top and my underwear.

"What the--" he exclaimed as his hands brushed my bare skin when he came to bed. "I got hot, I'm not making this up," I told him. He sighed and I knew he wanted to take this next step further, but neither of us was mentally ready for it, no matter how much we both wanted it.

"So we are really skipping school tomorrow," I asked him. "Why not. We haven't done it once before." He didn't seem to worry a bit. "We could sleep late and take it easy."

And he definitely didn't object as I kissed him goodnight, holding him as close as I could.

## 17. Chapter 17

### Notes for the Chapter:

Please notice the change of rating!

Our relationship didn't change that much, when it came to being out in public. Everyone who knew us considered it perfectly normal that we were spending lots of time together and sometimes even sharing our lunch and drinks.

However, nowadays we couldn't get enough of time alone, or especially behind the closed doors. For a few nights per week another one of us stayed to 'study' in another's room, and either left really early or very late to avoid suspicions, usually opting for late.

I loved bunking with him. Nights without him began to feel empty. And the tension between us was growing and it was only a matter of time before another one of us or more likely, us both couldn't wait anymore.

So, one evening we had serious talk about sex. He was surprised when he heard me being on birth control, but nodded in agreement as I pleaded we'd both go to tests. It wasn't really lack of trust, but more like being on the same page and committing to each other.

Two weeks later we had both gotten clear papers. Jonathan nudged me in the darkroom, asking if I wanted to go out on Friday. "Would you like to go eat at Alessandro's later?" "I'd love to," I replied and just smiled, since we weren't alone. We'd have time to talk in private later.

Our evening dinner was lovely, as expected. Alessandro made a huge deal out of us coming together and examining my boyfriend. "You take good care of her," he made Jonathan swear good-heartedly.

Nonetheless he gave us very nice table, and our portions were so huge we couldn't finish them. We'd have to take rest of them with us. For my surprise, Jonathan suggested we'd go afterwards for a walk.

I knew he had something in his mind, but I never expected we'd end up by the motel I had been staying at, when I had arrived at States. "What's going on," I asked when he headed purposefully for my old room and produced the key to wave for me.

A thousand thoughts raced through my head. "I'd like to tell you something," Jonathan said and opened the door, letting me go first. It made me nervous, what couldn't he tell when we had been at restaurant?

There was a pretty box of chocolate on the table, two wineglasses and two bottles of wine. Jonathan beckoned me to sit down, while he opened the bottle and poured to the glasses. "So I called home," he said, sitting down opposite me.

"I asked permission from Will to tell our story." He raised his eyes to mine. "I hope you're not going to freak out. At least so badly that you'll leave me." "Is it really that bad," I asked carefully. So this wasn't all about just our romance.

"It is madly bad," Jonathan shook his head, inhaling deeply. "Tell me if it is too much. And I hope, really hope, that you won't tell this forward for anybody. I realize it is a burden, but it's also for your protection. But you'd understand me and my family so much better," he pleaded.

I took a sip from my glass. "Go ahead. I'll try to be worthy of your trust," I promised and a little bit of tension left Jonathan's face. "Ok. Thanks. So, listen... It all began few years ago in the autumn. In the beginning of november. Will had been late at Wheeler's..." he began to tell his story.

Later when he finished, I sat still, leaning to the table. I didn't know how long he had been talking. All I knew was he had been having my undivided attention. He fell silent too, just beginning to look nervous again. "Say something, please," he asked me quietly.

"Wow," was the first thing that I could possibly think of saying. "So you believe me," he asked, incredulous. "I do," I answered slowly, still feeling like somebody had hit me with a sledgehammer to the head. "Really? It doesn't sound too surrealistic?" He asked doubtfully.

"Well, um... I think it sounds like too wonderful to be fantasized," I tried to find the words. "No wonder you are not into horror anymore. I wouldn't be," I said and he nodded.

So that's why he was so protective of his family. "So uh, you won't break up with me?" he asked, still nervous. I got up and went to him. "No," I wrapped my hands around him in consolation. He seemed like a weight had been lifted off him.

"I hope my family or our house won't freak you out, when we go to visit for christmas. Will they?" He was still pretty worried.

"It might be that I won't be going alone to walk the dog in the evening at dark forest anymore," I admitted. "So I will drag you along," I smiled weakly, but Jonathan luckily understood.

"So, did you bring me here because you worry about your room being bugged?" I asked. "No," he blushed. "I just wanted to be truly alone with you. And remember the time when I gave you rides to and from here," he replied.

"And... I wanted to make sure you'd still really want to be my girlfriend after telling about upside down and all that shit. Most people wouldn't," he said, and this must have been hardest thing for him.

Of course, there was one more reason left unsaid, but I thought he had trying hard enough already. I sat down on his lap and kissed him. He was so relieved it took him while to notice the way I kissed him.

But the kiss escalated, as it had been so near to do so on few days. After a while, his hands slipped to study bare skin on my smaller back, lifting my shirt. "Can I take it off," Jonathan whispered, asking for my permission. "Only if I can have yours," I smiled.

He got to action, hands and lips busy. "We could go to bed, you know," I hinted while I was raising his shirt off over his head. As soon as I got it off, he grabbed me and carried to bed, laying me gently down.

He was unexpectedly strong, I wondered until I almost drowned in his kisses, traveling down my stomach. He stopped, looking into me and waiting for green light to take off my trousers. "You don't have to ask," I told him hoarsely. "I'm yours," and he waited no longer.

After I had to seize the chance to roll on top of him to get my turn to take something of his off. And as I did, my hand was sliding on his bare skin as it revealed. When I got him naked, I thought he was beautiful, every inch of him from head to toes.

And I kissed his stomach in turn, traveling down between his legs and exciting him even more, licking and caressing him until he moaned. "Wait," he gasped. "Let me undress you fully," he almost begged.

I waited and he in turn got busy, hands traveling to meet my skin. As he dropped my bra, he sighed. "I've seen dreams about us," he whispered. "So what do you do," I got interested and he blushed.

"For the first time, I'd love to hold you in my arms," he said and climbed carefully on top as I laid down on my back. I spread my legs and he settled between. "Like this?" I whispered. "Yeah... are you really sure?" He asked.

I took him in my hand, guiding him to the right spot and he carefully pushed himself inside. It felt divine, to feel him in and he kissed me, holding me tighter as he began to move again. Our bodies found the rhythm together, pushing and pulling, speeding up as the need between us grew and grew.

I lifted my feet around him, found perfect friction and as I came, my clenching around him pushed him over too, shaking and shivering in me, as I enjoyed the last waves of my orgasm. When we both grew still, I gathered my courage.

"Jonathan, I love you," I told him, brushing away the hair from his eyes and saw the wonder and joy in his gaze. "I love you too," he replied, kissing me more gently than ever before. "That's the last thing I wanted to tell you," he added shyly, making me glow with happiness.

## 18. Chapter 18

### Summary for the Chapter:

Hi honeybunnies, this is it, the last chapter. Merry christmas, everybody! <3

We arrived day before christmas eve at Hawkins again, late in the evening. This time it felt different, since we had agreed between us that we'd both stay in Jonathan's room. The thing was, that Jonathan hadn't told yet about our dating to Will and Joyce.

We received just as eager welcome as last time, and Joyce and Will were happy that I came too. Even Will hugged me before turning to get our things from car.

I wondered if they would like the small presents I had gotten for them. For Will I had bought an assortment of some artist's pens and a sketchbook, since I knew he was a talented drawer. And for Joyce I had written and translated some of my family's favourite food recipes in a booklet.

As we stepped in, a mistletoe had been strung over the doorway between kitchen and livingroom. "Mom? What's that?" I heard Jonathan ask in a doubtful voice and he pointed towards the decoration.

Joyce was blushing. "Well I thought you might need a little push," she explained in a shy way and Will was squirming uneasily. "Just because you'd make a great couple..." she continued hastily and shut up as Jonathan stared at her.

He turned, walked over to me and scooped me up in an unexpected kiss in front of them. I heard Joyce gasp excitedly and as we parted, Will whooped, yelling aloud he'd known it!

"Well, we were going to tell you," I tried to say neutrally as they were high-fiving each other and Jonathan held his hand casually on my waist.



"Wait, what will happen when your year in exchange ends?" Will worried. "We don't know yet. It is bugging us too," I replied, frowning. We too had been thinking about it a lot, since we weren't eager to separate in the spring.

"Perhaps Jonathan could come to exchange in my country instead. Of course, I understand it's not fair to separate you for that kind of distance with the situation in your family. Maybe we could work out some kind of solution as a package deal and you could come too." I thought aloud of one of our possible solutions.

I winked at Joyce. "That is, if Jim Hopper will let you go," and her face flared up with blush. "It's nothing like that," she stuttered and Jonathan looked slightly shocked at our exchange.

"Well, we have time to think about it," I smiled. If nothing else, I'd consider moving here in States. I didn't want to lose the guy who had so completely stolen my heart.

Joyce had already changed the topic into last minute christmas shoppings that would have to be done tomorrow as she once again prepared to serve us late snack before we'd soon go to sleep for night.

I sighed happily as I sat down in the kitchen. Even though I had some new respect towards my surroundings, and definitely at certain people in this town, still it felt good to be here.

If person could have many homes, this felt like one. A happy homecoming for christmas.